

Intangible Cultural Heritage Update

News and notes on Newfoundland and Labrador's Intangible Cultural Heritage Program

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Labrador ICH Workshop

By Dale Jarvis

Earlier this month, I travelled to North West River, Labrador with Sarah Wade of the Museum Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (MANL). MANL was running a two-day conference on disaster preparedness for community museums, and I went along to offer a pre-conference workshop on ICH project planning and interviewing techniques.

We had a good turnout for the workshop, about 15 participants representing a variety of institutions and organizations, including the Battle Harbour Historic Trust, the White Elephant Museum, the Labrador Interpretation Centre, and the Labrador Institute Research Station.

We divided the day into two parts. In the morning, I gave an introduction to intangible cultural heritage, and had a discussion about different elements of ICH found in the region (and a mouthwatering chat about stove cakes, bannock, panitsiak and bread making), followed by a session on proper planning for cultural documentation projects.

After lunch, we had a session on the dos and don'ts of interviewing, with tips on how to get interesting answers, and how to set up a space for a good quality audio recording. As part of the workshop, participants created a series of questions about holidays and community celebrations, and then I conducted a sample interview with Heritage Foundation board member and Makkovik native Joan Andersen (photo of Joan being interviewed above, by Sarah Wade).

Joan talked about the tradition of Bonfire/Guy Fawkes Night in Makkovik, how the bonfire has changed in recent years, Moravian Advent and Christingle services, memories of visiting at Christmas; and the Makkovik nalujuk tradition, amongst other topics. That interview will be archived as part of the ongoing ICH inventory on Memorial University's Digital Archives Initiative (collections.mun.ca).

All in all, another great trip to Labrador! Thanks to MANL for partnering with us on this workshop, and for the Labrador Interpretation Centre for providing the excellent venue.

Make and Break Festival Review

By Joelle Carey

Ryan Premises National Historic Site was alive with the sound of nostalgic chatter on Saturday, August 4th. The Make and Break Engine Festival took place in the historic town of Bonavista which provided a scenic backdrop for the festivities of the day: a make and break “motorboat” flotilla, a museum exhibit, a musket salute, the singing of the Ode to Newfoundland, and to end the day, a part swap.

Two and a half months of planning led up to the festival which went off without much trouble. With the exception of a few hiccups, which meant that the flotilla went ahead with five boats instead of the anticipated seven, the event went off smoothly, both on land and water.

Spectators watched from Ryan Premises National Historic Site and from the main dock in Bonavista. What they witnessed were five traditional wooden boats all complete with make and break engines; the Newfoundland “motorboat.” The flotilla was small, but what it lacked in size it made up in sound. The piercing rhythm of make and break engines filled the skies the way they would have at the peak of their use, from the early 1900s to the beginning of the 1960s.

On land, observers were filled with excitement at a sound that has been disappearing from our waters and, indeed, from the lives of those who grew accustomed to the sound during their youth. Some said they never thought they would hear the make and break engines on the water again while others commented on how they did not realize how much interest there truly was in the old engines. Many commented on how the engines acted as an alarm clock during the summer months when they were younger - fishermen leaving the harbours to go fishing for the day.

On the water, the men running their engines could not keep the smiles off their faces as they chased each other “like playing ducks,” as Gerald Bashforth, a flotilla participant, put it. Playing like ducks happy to be reunited with some of their own kind.



I was in the flotilla and sat at the front of Gerald Bashforth’s 4hp Atlantic powered boat. The feeling on the water that day was cheerful and content. Riding in a Newfoundland motorboat is an experience altogether different than being in any other type of craft.

With speedboats (those buzzing boats with outboard engines) you cut through the water, never feeling the pulsating motion of the waves beneath you, never being able to concentrate on your surroundings or the activity at hand.

Being in a motorboat is incomparable; you connect with the landscape, you feel the surge of the water, and the engine complements the sound and feeling of waves hitting the hull. You

are in the water and bound to it - not just a separate entity riding on top of it. The motorboat of Newfoundland allows you to feel as though the water is as natural a place to be as dry land and, indeed, for our ancestors, it had to be. The feeling cannot be fully described without gushing poetic, ask anyone who has been in one.

The smiles that rejoiced around me on the day of the events came from the sense of belonging, a sense of camaraderie in an endeavor that some of these men may have thought was impossible - bringing new life to these old engines. Many of the men that gathered that day did not know each other, although they may have known of one another. The older generation mixed with the younger and by the end of the day new friendships were born - new friendships that will hopefully last as long as the influence of the make and break engines.

There were whispers that day of making the event an annual meet, of engine owners coming together to form an association which would allow them all to keep their engines running and, hopefully, get more back on the water.

While we will have to wait to see the realization of these desires, I think it is safe to say that with the Make and Break Engine Festival the future of make and break engines in our province has been solidified.



From L to R - Charles Donnelly, Philip Lethbridge, Chris Sullivan, Kevin Price, Ted Hiscock, Joelle Carey, Max Clarke, David Ellis, Ed Norman, Charley Abbott, Robin Paul.

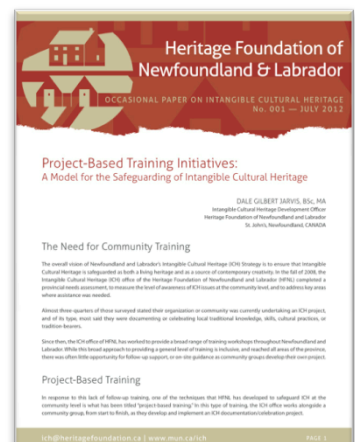
Occasional Papers in Intangible Cultural Heritage

By Dale Jarvis

The Intangible Cultural Heritage office of the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador (HFNL) is always working on one type of workshop, presentation, research project, or another. I try to include what I can in the newsletter or the ICH blog, but it seems I rarely have time to go into any great detail on many of the projects we are involved with.

In order to let you know a bit more about what we are working on, and to share some of the ideas we are developing around the safeguarding and best practices for intangible cultural heritage, HFNL has started an occasional papers publication. So far, we have two short papers, which deal with the project-based training model we are developing for ICH projects. Both papers are available to download as a pdf from the Memorial University ICH resources page:

www.mun.ca/ich/resources



Pillow Tops: Crafts and Group Socialization in Newfoundland Lumber Camps

by Nicole Penney

Due to the abundance of harvestable trees in Newfoundland and Labrador, forestry developed as a viable industry. Men worked in sawmills, went into the woods around their communities to cut with a handful of other lumbermen or worked in the lumber camps. Many men worked a combination of all of these jobs and traditions evolved and were transmitted as a result.

Cutting and collecting lumber was arduous work and the only day the men in the camps had off was Sunday. They would occupy themselves by singing folk songs and playing practical jokes, telling bawdy jokes, playing cards and telling folktales and legends.

As Joe Mason states in *My Sixteenth Winter: Logging on the French River*, “we had no radio in camp, no books or magazines were obtainable...we had to make our own fun.”

But as John Kitchen notes in *By the Sweat of my Brow: The Life of a Newfoundland Logger*, cards and bawdy songs were “not always approved of by some more refined or delicate ears.”

Reading was an option but according to David Lee in *Great Forests and Mighty Men: Early years in Canada’s vast Woodlands*, “few men were able to read [and] the poor lighting would have made it difficult for those who could.”

Crafts would have been a friendly alternative, such as the pillow tops made by men in the lumber camps in Bonavista Bay, Newfoundland. These were square-shaped textiles woven from wool using a wooden frame. They were made and gifted to girlfriends, wives and mothers for the purpose of sewing on the top of a pillow for decoration.

There have been many studies on logging that do make note of recreational activities in the camps but few that mention crafts in particular. Some lumbermen are known to be talented woodworkers, such as William Richards and Carl Tafton, who are the focus of exhibits at the Rangeley Lakes Regional Logging Museum in Maine. However it is unclear if woodworking and other crafts in those cases were ever pursued by men in the lumber camps as a method of group socialization.

One example where craft did serve this function can be demonstrated in the creation of pillow tops (*shown right*), as described by Raymond Russell, my grandfather, who was born in 1933 in the small community of Lethbridge, located in Bonavista Bay. While agriculture was the predominant industry in the community, logging was also a popular occupation. From a young age Russell worked in the woods cutting small amounts of wood for a local merchant. He also worked alongside his father and older brothers as he grew, and he later worked with them in the family’s sawmill.

On occasion Russell would work in the lumber woods, a camp located upwards of 50 miles in the woods, where men cut and hauled lumber for several months during the winter. In 1958 he worked in a camp for the Anglo Newfoundland Development (A.N.D) Company in Terra Nova, Bonavista Bay. To pass the time he made a pillow top for his wife.

“Someone started it”, remembers Russell, “I guess it came from another camp. Up in the lumber woods were camps and there might be a camp here and another 20-50 miles away. So someone just started this off and we got into it.”

The making of the pillow top began with a hand made wooden frame, approximately 30-40 cm by 30-40 cm in size. The wooden frame then had several nails put in all around the border, however, the nails are left protruding from the frame, not hammered the entire way through. Wool was taken and wrapped around the head of a nail and crossed back and forth from one nail to another. Three colours were used at the beginning to make the backing of the pillow top. One colour, in this case

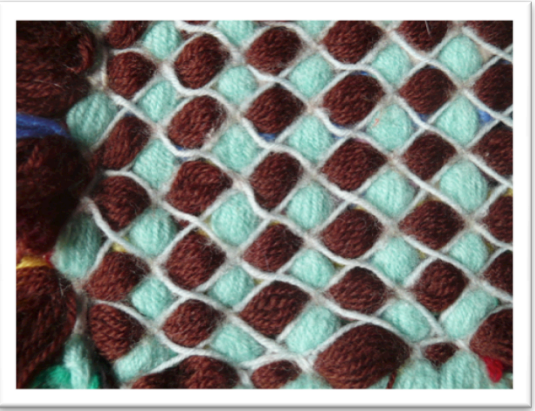


white, was put from nail to nail diagonally to form the diamond pattern. Two other colours, in this instance brown and turquoise, were strung from nail to nail horizontally and vertically. After the backing was complete, wool was wrapped from one nail to another and back and forth until the entire frame was filled. When there was enough wool on the frame, the wool that crossed over was cut with a razor blade and rubbed with the fingertips until they spread out and formed little balls.

According to Russell, the shaping of the balls was the most time consuming part of the the process and would take longer than making the rest of the pillow top.

“We used to help each other see? A fellow would run into a problem and the other guy that was good at it, he’d help him out. We were working more or less together. Not all of us now, but so many of us-we’d get together and make them.”

This process of learning sewing techniques from more experienced craftspeople is also described by Margaret Yocum in “Awful Real: Dolls and Development in Rangeley, Maine”, which explores the tradition of knitting baby doll clothes in a rural Maine logging community. She writes, “traditional learning among women is rural Maine thus consisted of learning by sitting close to another woman, watching her, and receiving instructions as the process went on.”



It took about two Sundays to make the pillow top and as Russell describes, it became a popular way to pass the time that winter.

“I was only young then”, recalls Russell, “the older guys now, they wouldn’t be interested in this... a lot of people loved their rest on Sundays, but we would be right on the go. So many would get together to make them.”

The construction of the pillow top was more significant than the end result because it was a way in which men in the camps could socialize. This activity brought together groups of young men who would go several months without seeing their families. For many going into the lumber camps may have also been the first long stay away from home. Recreation was very important in the camps as it not only passed the time but gave the

men a way in which to bond by creating something together.

(Top photos, detail of pillow top reverse. Bottom photo, detail of front. All photos by Nicole Penney.)

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